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ABSTRACT

The National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASILP) offers a program option for institutions that lack the resources to develop a regular second language program but want to offer instruction in a broad range of languages for international businesses. The cost-effective, media-intensive approach consists of a controlled program of instruction coordinated by an individual from the institution, often a trained language teacher, who selects and orients tutors and finds appropriate materials, equipment, and qualified tester/consultants with the assistance of NASILP. Students accepted into the program receive a large-group orientation to learn about the program and materials, meet their tutors, and set up tutoring sessions. Testing is done by an external consultant, usually individually and orally. Tutors, often foreign students, provide oral practice. Students spend at least 2 hours in the language laboratory before each practice session. Instructional groups usually have 4 to 6 students. The coordinator visits the group 4 to 6 times each semester. Because a NASILP program can be started with few students and limited resources, the addition of a language component is possible for many international business programs. The NASILP program also makes possible the study of two or more languages simultaneously, or the addition of languages during a career. (MSE)

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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS (NASILP) AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: NATURAL ALLIES

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NASILP and International Business: Natural Allies

Any American college or university business department must offer curricula which are significantly internationalized to be taken seriously in today's academic market. There are many components to an effective and successful international business program, among which are meaningful, focused foreign language and culture studies and experiences. To provide these particular segments of an overall schedule, institutions generally look to appropriate courses in foreign languages, area studies, history, political science, geography, anthropology and to activities such as overseas studies and internships. Problems often arise, however, when staffing and budgetary limitations preclude a totally felicitous admixture of offerings for a solid program.

Very often the short-fall comes in the number, type and scope of foreign languages available to the students looking to participate in American business' belated awakening to the importance of relevant numbers of their representatives knowing at least the essentials of the customer's language, customs and general culture. Some major university centers in the United States have available for their students fully developed, usually traditional, academic programs in perhaps 8-10 language areas and courses in something like 8-10 more. A very limited number offers even more opportunities for foreign language study. What about the rest? The vast majority of universities, four-year colleges and junior colleges in the country do not have the resources to present their students with opportunities of this magnitude. Yet almost all of the colleges and universities offer business programs. Since the global economy we live in makes all business programs implicitly international in nature, it is obvious that the tendency toward internationalizing the business programs will continue and that more American institutions will want to develop explicitly international business programs. For many of these schools, a cost-effective, media-intensive proven approach to the problem such

as that developed by the National Association of Self Instruction Language Programs (NASILP), may present an important aid. Indeed, in some instances a NASILP or similar method could make the difference of whether an international business program is feasible at a given institution or not.

NASILP was developed mainly by a group of academic institutions in the northeastern part of the United States. Its aim was to deal realistically with the critical situation regarding the dearth of study of a large number of more or less uncommonly taught languages. It has today become the premier inter-institutional alliance for dealing with this problem throughout the United States. Approximately 140 institutions, mainly of higher education, are now members. It sets and oversees standards and practices, provides workshops and guidance for new and regular member organizations, gathers and disseminates information regarding available and developing self-teaching equipment and materials, keeps records on and coordinates qualified testers, and generally gives direction and cohesion to a growing national effort.

The NASILP method is more controlled than the description, "self instruction," might indicate. It requires an active coordinator who screens, orients, supervises, and is responsible for organizing and running the program. The coordinator, with the help of appropriate colleagues or the national office of NASILP, selects and orients appropriate tutors. NASILP workshops and informational services also help the coordinator to find fitting materials, equipment and qualified tester/consultants. The financial commitment of the coordinator's institution can be quite small. Impressive results have been obtained with books, purchased by the students, and cassette players, tapes and native-speaking practice tutors. More sophisticated equipment can, of course, enhance the results greatly. The most promising new equipment and materials being developed and used in the NASILP approach are video drill and instruction tapes, and direct international television. Computer aided instruction, especially when it is voice directed and employs verbal responses, is

now also available and used for self instruction. Even the use of these more sophisticated technical aids rarely causes the cost of instruction in the NASILP mode to match or even approximate the costs of regular instruction. This holds true even when, as is typically the case, the coordinator is granted a reduced teaching load consonant with the number students and make up of the NASILP program he or she coordinate.s

Students desiring to study a foreign language in the NASILP mode are usually not permitted to select a language, or course type within that language, if it is available in regular instruction on campus. A screening session is held with each student to be certain the student fully understands the program and its expectations. Students are generally discouraged from attempting the program if they have had no successful foreign language learning experience in the regular classroom method, are not academically secure students who work will independently and do not seem prepared and motivated to work hard. NASILP school members vary as to their selectivity for the program as they do in other aspects of the NASILP guidelines. SUNY at Buffalo, for instance, one of the largest and oldest NASILP programs actually turned away 300 of the 600 would-be participants this year in its program involving the study of 10 different languages. Other NASILP schools may deal with small numbers in two or three languages on a less rigorous selection basis.

After initial individual interviews, students accepted into the program gather in larger groups for their first orientation session. These groups may consist of all students in a given language, or language group, or of the whole group of students in the NASILP program. Usually even students who have already studied for a semester or more in the NASILP mode must come to all organization and orientation meetings. Generally there are between 2-4 such meetings per semester. At each of them, video tapes on the NASILP method are seen and analyzed. General problems facing the students are shared and discussed. Continued guidance is given by the

coordinator. At the first general meeting of the semester, the students meet their tutors and set up two one-hour drill or practice sessions per week. They also learn what books they are to purchase, what material they are to cover in those books, the weekly tape or video requirements for the semester, how they are to prepare and perform at the drill sessions, etc.

They are also reminded that their grade in the course is set by an outside, qualified examiner who acts as a consultant at various times during the semester. Some NASILP schools have two examinations, one at mid-semester and one at the end of the semester. Other schools have just one at the end of the semester. The examinations are generally oral in nature and individually conducted. NASILP assists individual campuses in finding qualified testers and is currently planning workshops to orient otherwise qualified testers to the NASILP method and appropriate oral testing style. NASILP expects testers to be trained teachers of the language being tested who are currently employed and actively teaching the language at an accredited institution of higher education.

The tutor is normally a foreign student though often members of ethnic groups in an area make appropriate tutors. The tutor is not expected to be a teacher, nor should he or she be permitted to act as one. The tutor should speak the language fully as a native and employ standard speech or an acceptable dialect. NASILP provides video tapes and general guidance for the tutor and the coordinator. In general, the tutor is expected to be a very active drill master. His or her students must practice in the language laboratory at least two hours prior to each practice session and a total of at least five hours per week. These hours would vary, of course, dependent upon the amount of credit being sought for the course, as would the number of meetings with the practice tutor. The requirement of five hours in the language laboratory and two hours with the tutor is typical for a course carrying three semester hours of credit. One constant, however, is that the students' books remains closed and out of reach during the practice sessions. A

student who does not come to the session prepared to practice without the use of a book is considered unprepared and, usually, not able to fully participate in the session. The tutor keeps a record of such cases of lack of preparation as well as absences and reports them to the coordinator. After one or more warnings such students are usually dropped from the program. The basis for the drop is a contract or agreement the student must sign to participate in the program. Such forced drops are not common because of the screening and the high level of self-motivation typically exhibited by participating students. Further, the vigor of the work and the guidance of the coordinator generally suffice to lead a student who is unable to keep up with the work to drop out of the course on his own free will.

The coordinator typically visits each group of students 4-6 times per semester, making suggestions and overseeing the whole process. Groups are usually kept small, rarely over 4-6 students, in order to encourage active use of the language. Trained foreign language teachers make the best coordinators. Often a teacher of a foreign language not in great demand, acting as the NASILP coordinator, adds to the number and type of languages his or her department can offer while at the same time protecting his job. Many successful coordinators have come from other disciplines, however. Aside from personal motivation, this may come about because knowledge of one or more foreign languages, often uncommonly taught ones, is sometimes required by geographers, anthropologists, historians, etc.

Since it is possible to start a NASILP program with few students and resources, it is an ideal way for any school to begin to add the important element of oral proficiency to the other components required for an effective program in international business. Few NASILP programs permit their students to take a language for more than 4-6 semesters of study. Since it emphasizes oral proficiency, however, the results in this area, the one most desired for international business programs, are more impressive than one, not experienced with the method, might expect. All grammar and vocabulary drills, almost all work, is done in the

target language from the beginning. As a rule, the use of English is not permitted in practice sessions with the tutor. The extensive work with audio and video tapes buttresses this oral aspect of the study, indeed, is more important to the success of the program than the work with the tutors. Careful selection of the students, regular control and guidance, and rigorous testing plus the oral focus, generally bring about an ability to speak a language with a fluency sometimes not attained in a more traditional major.

This relatively quick path to a useful level of oral proficiency is another reason the NASILP approach works well in an international business program. It permits a student to work on two, three or even more languages in preparing himself or herself for a career. It also works well for adding languages quickly, as needed, while pursuing a career. The open nature of the method and its heavy reliance on media permit flexible scheduling, including a heavy concentration of work that can amount to total immersion for shorter or longer periods of time. The large number of languages which are easily available for study in the NASILP mode and the relatively inexpensive costs involved present the possibility of adding a rich array of foreign language learning opportunities for any institutions of higher education. It is particularly valuable to those institutions trying to develop or enrich a solid program in international business.

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